

## CHAPTER 1

### BACKGROUND TO THE REVIEW

#### Origins of the Review

1.1 The Working Party is aware that for many years those who served after the 27 July 1953 Armistice felt the distinction between service during the combat period and the later service in the Korean theatre. Previous reviews of medal entitlements have commented on aspects of post-Armistice Korean service, in response to the number of Ministerial representations which have been received on this subject over a long period. Chapter 4 sets out the Working Party's summary of these earlier reviews.

1.2 In August 2004, the then Minister Assisting the Minister for Defence (the Honourable Fran Bailey MP) announced a review to resolve the specific issue of appropriate recognition of Korean post-Armistice service. Following the Federal Election and the appointment of the current Minister (the Honourable De-Anne Kelly BE, MP), the current Working Party was established in 2005. Relevant media releases by the Minister and public notices issued by the Working Party are in Appendix 2.

1.3 Much of the impetus for the Review came from the Korean War Veterans of Australia Recognition Committee (KWVARC), based at Nowra NSW.

#### Summary of the outcomes sought by veterans and their representatives

1.4 The majority of post-Armistice veterans who submitted their views to the Working Party have joined in a three-point claim for recognition. In the words of the KWVARC:

"It is essential if justice is to be done that the Review panel must be instructed to properly address each one of the 3 following issues, namely the legal entitlement of Australian Korean War Veterans who were allotted to, and served in, the Korean Area of Operations between 28 July 1953 and 19 April 1956, to:

- a. The returned from Active Service badge, and
- b. The Australian Active Service Medal 1945–1975, with Korean clasp, and
- c. Approval and recognition of those Korean War Veterans deaths during their allotment to and service in the Korean Operational Area between 28 July 1953 and 19 April 1956 to:
  - (i) Their deaths being listed as war-caused deaths on active service and their next of kin awarded their entitlements,
  - (ii) Their names being included in official Honour Rolls and Memorials including those at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra and the United Nations Cemetery at Pusan, Korea.
  - (iii) Their bodies, if located, to be buried at the United Nations Cemetery at Pusan, Korea or
  - (iv) If their bodies cannot be located their names to be added to the Unit Bronze Plaques on the British Commonwealth Memorial at the United Nations cemetery at Pusan, Korea."

1.5 In their submissions, there is frequent reference to 'consistent, long-standing, binding Federal legislation'.

1.6 Similar views were put by the many supporters from all around Australia of an increased level of recognition for post-Armistice veterans:

“And it’s the position of the Committee that it is anomalous that if there was operational service, that the men and women who served were not given a Returned from Active Service Badge, or not awarded the Australian Active Service Medal 1945–75. The position that we adopted is that it is our belief that as it’s operational service... that these Veterans should be awarded the Active Service Medal and Returned from Active Service Badge.”

---

“... our Sub-Branch is appalled that servicemen and women who served in Korea were not provided with a Medal and the Active Service Badge. These personnel who laid their lives on the line should receive all the entitlements of others who fought operationally.”

---

“... may I request that these 1953–1957 Veterans be awarded the recognition their service to country and United Nations so richly deserves.”

---

“... my purpose in appearing before the Committee is to support the submission made for the acceptance of service post the Armistice in 1953 as being recognised as being operational service and eligible service for recognition by the awarding of the Returned from [Active] Service Badge and the appropriate campaign medal.”

---

“It would be nothing short of a national disgrace for any more of these men to pass away without the rightful recognition they both deserve and as far as I am concerned, are entitled to.”

---

“I believe that when the Government granted campaign medals for pre Armistice service and refused them for later service it created a clear anomaly that should now be corrected.”

---

“Our original thoughts were that the [medal] criteria should stand... Through our ignorance of [the number of post-Armistice deaths] we now feel that our original decision is flawed and we humbly ask that your committee disregard our previous correspondence and we give our support to this cause.”

---

“And I think it’s very unfair that our mates that served up there after the ceasefire didn’t get their proper recognition, especially the Returned from Active Service Badge. It’s something with a Digger that gives him pride... I think we’d be poor mates if we weren’t fighting here today for what we want to achieve. And gentlemen, have it in your hearts as to why we’re fighting. I don’t think there’s a member here that hasn’t got his rights. We’ve all got our Returned from Active Service Badge. We’ve all got our gongs. We’re not appearing here from a selfish, self-motivated point of view. We’re appearing here because we owe something to our mates that served up in Korea with us.”

---

“The [ASM] doesn’t cover (I believe, really) what the service put in.”

---

“Ian Crawford:

Your position on the matters under review, the award of the Returned from Active Service Badge and the Medal?

“Witness:

Well, I say that for the conditions we served under, and the work that we did and the risks we took, we’re fully entitled to it. And I don’t see why we should not be given it.”

---

“Garry Nehl:

Because having read your initial submission and the next one, I think I understand, but you are opposed to the proposition for the AASM and the Returned from Active Service Badge being extended after the ceasefire?

“Witness:

Perhaps I might have come on a little heavy there. I am not opposed to the Returned from Active Service Badge being issued, not at all. I think they should be issued with that. I am merely speaking for many who were on active service and they treasure the Australian Active Service Medal as being something which was earned in action. Now I believe they deserve some form of recognition.”

---

“Ian Crawford:

Now, you’ve made your statement earlier on that you believe that the Returned from Active Service Badge and the Australian Active Service Medal...

“Witness:

Oh definitely, there is no doubt in my mind. And I’m only here just to speak for the chaps that... mates of mine and that. Sir, I can only speak for my Battalion at that period of time. But we all thought we were on active service and the dangers were there.”

---

“What would it take—after considering all the facts—to decide on the positive by this review panel and decide, yes, these men do qualify for:

1. The Returned from Active Service Badge.
2. The Australian Active Service Medal 1945—1975 with ‘Korea’ Clasp.
3. Recognition of the deaths of Korea War Veterans who died during their allotment to the Korean operational area between 28th of July 1953 and the 19th of April 1956 as war caused deaths.

“I feel they’re not begging for special treatment, but I plead on their behalf that this panel look within their own conscience and concur that they only seek a just resolution for the few that are still alive today.”

1.7 The KWVARC have also received support for their cause from their local Federal and State Members of Parliament—Mrs Joanna Gash MP (Federal Member for Gilmore) and Mrs Shelley Hancock MP (State Member for South Coast).

1.8 However, the views within the veteran community are far from unanimous. Opinion appears fairly evenly divided between those who strongly support the claim and those who strongly oppose it. There are differences of view between (and in some cases within) various veterans’ associations. Many army veterans from the pre-Armistice period, and even some from the post-Armistice period, do not support

the claim for the AASM and RASB. In general, many veterans seek to maintain a clear distinction between those who were on 'war service' (as they see it) and those who were not.

1.9 Counter-views put to the Working Party included these from veterans' associations:

"Our Association is somewhat divided on this matter however providing there was a distinct difference in Medal identification you would have our full support."

---

"The decision of the Meeting was that 'Active Service' concluded on July 27th 1953 with the signing of the Cease Fire. This decision was reached with the full support of a number of members who served between the Cease Fire and April 1956. ... We believe that on a matter of principal [sic], there must be a DISTINCTION for 'Active Service' between those who served from June 25th 1950 until July 27th 1953 and those who served after the Cease Fire. This is with due respect."

---

"[We] are united in our rejection of the proposal that service following the Armistice in Korea in 1953 should be awarded any recognition other than the AUSTRALIAN SERVICE MEDAL, nor should it be the ACTIVE SERVICE BADGE for that period of service."

---

"We don't believe the military situation in Korea after July 1953 warrants the award of the Australian Active Service Medal, nor the Returned from Active Service Badge."

---

"The answer is no to the Returned from Active Service Medal."

---

"General consensus amongst the membership is that the service post-Armistice was of a peacekeeping nature and not of a warlike nature... Amongst the members of the post-Armistice contingent of our unit, I have had told to me by the persons concerned that they have written to the inquiry rejecting the award of the AASM and the Returned from Active Service Badge. These are not members who served pre-Armistice."

---

"The membership of this sub-branch (600 members), including our Korean veterans, is strongly of the view that the medal/badges that you are considering should only be awarded for operational service and that that operational service ended with the armistice. To depart from this principle is to downgrade the medals already awarded to those who actually had such operational service."

and these from individual veterans:

"To grant [the AASM] to Johnny come laterly [sic] it would be an insult to the 320 that lay in forian sole [sic] Pusan Korea... Don't cheapen the AASM for those that came when it was all over."

---

“I find it difficult to support any attempt to award the Australian Active Service Medal with clasp KOREA and the Returned From Active Service Badge for service between 28 July 53 and 26 August 57... any attempt to award these soldiers for service in Korea during the period of the armistice would make a mockery of the award system.”

---

“If [the RASB] was to be awarded to Post 27th July 1953, then this alone would open the flood gates for those of WWII and all others, who saw no action to make their claim for the Badge... With regards to the Australian Active Service Medal being awarded to Post-Armistice 27th July 1953 some 50 years after the event is out of the question, the Medal is for what it is named ‘Active Service’.”

---

“I wish to register my opinion that to award the ‘Australian Active Service Medal 1945–75 with clasp KOREA’ would be absolutely inappropriate.”

---

[From a 1957 Korea veteran] “... the Active Service medal should be issued only to those who serving [sic] in these areas during the actual conflicts. For the rest like myself we should be issued with the General Service Medal for the area or areas served.”

---

“... I still find myself overwhelmed by my first feelings of outrage, at the fact that this step is even being seriously considered... we have earned [our medals] the hard way. Believe me, I have the greatest respect for those who came after us... They... should be recognized in some way, but not at the expense of degrading the medals paid for, by so many of our gallant lads who still lie in Pusan Cemetery.”

---

“Yes.. it would be acceptable for the proposed awards to be granted to the Korean vets... BUT only up till July 1954... I think going to 1957 is rather drawing a long bow.”

---

“...certainly not a Returned from Active Service [Badge] nor an Infantry Combat Badge.”

---

“I believe that the post-Armistice people, now they have the Gold Card and they have an Australian Service Medal with a ‘Korea’ Bar on, have been well enough looked after. And it would not in my opinion be proper for them to be put on the same footing as those who had active service in World War Two, Korea, Malaya, Vietnam....”

---

“Without denigrating the service of post-Armistice 1953 servicemen and women the medal, in my mind, should be reserved for the active service period 1950–53.”

## **The Department of Defence view**

1.10 The Department of Defence administers the Honours and Awards System for all members of the Australian Defence Force, past and present. The Secretary of the Department, Mr Ric Smith AO, PSM, provided the Working Party with a written

submission. The Working Party was advised that the matter had been discussed with the Chief of the Defence Force and Service Chiefs, who concurred with the response.

1.11 The submission included helpful background information on the evolution of the Australian campaign medals system and the meaning of terms used.

1.12 The Department's overall position can be summarised as seeing no need for change in the current recognition of post-Armistice service in Korea:

"From a Defence perspective, the award of the *Australian Service Medal* with Clasp 'KOREA' was a good result as it ensured that this previously unrecognised service was recognised."

1.13 The submission referred to "a number of reviews over the past decade which have had an effect on Defence awards". It noted that the recommendations which flowed from them "have created increased pressure from many ex-Service members to have similar service recognised". The Secretary went on to express a concern about the possible flow-on effects of the Working Party's deliberations:

"I therefore ask that in your considerations of post-Armistice service in Korea, you take into account any precedents that could be established if the level of recognition were increased and the concern that other service should not be devalued by any new decisions made."

1.14 These key points were reiterated in evidence that representatives of the Department put to the Working Party at a public hearing in Canberra. After referring to the findings of earlier reviews which indicated that the current recognition of post-Armistice service was appropriate, the representatives went on:

"Regardless of the decision you arrive at, Defence believes there are two principles which need to be considered. The first principle concerns the matter of precedents. Defence asks that in your considerations of the post-Armistice service in Korea, you take into account any precedents that could be established if the level of recognition for this service were to be increased. That's the first principle. The second principle concerns the matter of value, and specifically Defence is of the view that service in other operations in the past should not be devalued by any new decisions that are made."

1.15 In response to a question at the Public Hearing in Canberra, one of the Department of Defence representatives later provided a very helpful letter of explanation. Other aspects of the Defence submission and evidence are considered in other relevant chapters of this Report.

## Conclusions

1.16 Three things are clear from the issues presented in this Chapter.

1.17 First, the question of appropriate recognition of post-Armistice Korean service is both complex and sensitive. This is why the Minister established this Review.

1.18 Second, it will be impossible for the outcomes of the Review to satisfy everyone. The Working Party must concentrate on finding a fair and reasonable approach, taking account of the concerns expressed.

1.19 Third, this is probably the last opportunity to resolve the question of appropriate recognition in a systematic way within the lifetime of our surviving veterans of Korean service.

